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Repackaging Bulk Foods

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REPACKAGING BULK FOODS

Repackaging is considered a complex food preparation operation because it involves breaking quality control seals, physically handling the product (instead of just handling the package), and labeling information for product safety.

REPACKAGING ENVIRONMENT

Location: The facilities for any food preparation operation should be near a source of hot water (for hand washing, cleaning, and sanitizing) and should be separate from other activities. If physical separation (a separate room) is not possible, the activities should be separated by time.

Cleaning: Before beginning a re-packaging operation, all countertops should be sanitized with 100ppm chlorine (approximately 1 Tbsp of bleach per gallon of water). Equipment, utensils and containers should be washed, rinsed, sanitized with 50 ppm chlorine (1 tsp of bleach per gallon of water) and air-dried. These areas should be cleaned again immediately after use.

CONTAINERS

Containers should seal in order to protect the product. Use only food-grade containers.

Note: "Vacuum packaging" is not recommended for food bank repackaging efforts.

New Containers

- The easiest solution for many repackaging situations is to use plastic food-grade bags that can be sealed. Paper bags offer minimal protection and are not recommended.
- Never reuse plastic bags, aluminum foil, plastic wrap, or freezer wrap, because they cannot be easily cleaned, are not durable, and often are absorbent. (All of these qualities make it easy for the materials to collect bacteria.)

Sanitized, reused containers

- Containers for repackaged foods should be easily cleanable, non-absorbent, durable, and smooth.

- All containers must be cleaned and sanitized properly.
- Examples of containers that may be reused are glass jars and heavy plastic tubs (butter containers or restaurant-grade containers such as those used for sour cream).
- Containers should be carefully examined for chips or cracks. Jar lids should be clean and free of rust. All defective containers should be discarded.
- Containers that have been used to store chemicals should not be used to store food.

HANDLING

Gloves should be worn when directly touching a food that may not be washed or cooked again before consumption. Utensils may also be used to avoid direct hand-to-food contact. Gloves and utensils are not a substitute for proper hand washing.

Use caution in **repackaging any food that will be served to an "at-risk" population**. Examples include powdered milk or formula used to serve the elderly or infants.

Use care in **repackaging any food that was packaged under pressure, heat, or vacuum-sealed**. Violation of this type of package decreases the shelf life and may require special measures such as refrigeration. (Note: most canned or bottled goods fall under this category.)

Use packaging that is appropriate for the food you are working with. Never pour hot liquids into ordinary glass jars; they are not tempered to withstand sudden heat changes and may break.

Food should never be kept out of temperature for more than 2 hours. This includes time spent in transportation, thawing, preparation, and distribution.

Dispose of unsafe food appropriately and quickly.

LABELING

Labeling is required by law on all food produced by manufacturers. In repackaging operations, food banks separate the label information from the food. Minimally, you should supply a replacement label with the product name and a list of ingredients.

A more complete label, however, would include:

- The common or usual name of the product
- The net weight
- A list of ingredients
- Applicable dates (such as the original “sell by” date, the date the food was repackaged, or the expiration date).

You could also include serving instructions on the label. For some foods, a recipe or serving instructions have been shown to dramatically increase the rate of use.

Adapted from the Safe Aid Series, Montana State University Extension Service, 1996

DIGGING DEEPER – SANITARY SURROUNDINGS

- 1) Which of the following does not need to be on a food label?
- a) product name
 - b) picture of product
 - c) net weight
 - d) ingredients

- 2) Equipment, utensils and containers should be washed, rinsed, sanitized, and air-dried. What concentration of chlorine can be used to effectively sanitize?

- a) 5ppm chlorine
- b) 50ppm chlorine
- c) 250ppm chlorine
- d) 500ppm chlorine

- 3) Containers for re-packaged foods should be _____.

- a) easily cleanable
- b) non-absorbent
- c) durable
- d) smooth
- e) food-grade
- f) all of the above

- 4) Gloves should be worn or utensils used when handling which of these foods?

- a) a box of powdered milk
- b) cans of fruit
- c) bread or buns not in original packaging
- d) bag of potato chips



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